



NNEDV
NATIONAL NETWORK
TO END DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

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Priorities for the 117th Congress: Legislation and Funding to Address Survivors' Needs – June 2021

Introduction

Our nation is in the midst of multiple, intersecting crises that exacerbate disparities and endanger survivors of domestic violence. To make real strides in reducing gender-based violence during this challenging time, Congress must invest in strategies that advance access to safety, justice, and economic stability for survivors while reducing reliance on systems that are not helping all survivors. All funding and policies must center the needs of historically marginalized survivors.

This document outlines the legislative priorities of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) and how Congress can make real the changes survivors need. Earlier this year, we also developed our priorities for the new Administration, entitled [The Next Steps to Ending Domestic Violence: 100 Day and Ongoing Recommendations for the Biden-Harris Administration](#) and, together, these two documents provide a roadmap to creating the necessary federal changes that will ultimately address survivors' long-term security.

NNEDV celebrates the remarkable beginning of the 117th Congress, marked by progress on a number of our key priorities:

- ★ The [American Rescue Plan](#) included substantial resources that address survivors' needs, including \$400 million for domestic violence and sexual assault services;
- ★ The VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021 ("VOCA Fix") (H.R. 1652) passed in the House and was introduced (S. 611) in the Senate;
- ★ The [Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021](#) (H.R. 1620) passed in the House; and
- ★ The Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act of 2021 (H.R. 2119 and S. 1275) was introduced in the House and Senate.

NNEDV urges Congress to build on this incredible start to save VOCA; invest in effective programs through the FY22 Appropriations process; reauthorize and build upon key pieces of legislation; and pass new legislation to meet the housing, economic, and other needs of survivors.

Save the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)

Committee: Judiciary

Over 6,000 local organizations rely on funds from VOCA to provide lifesaving direct services to victims of all types of crime annually. [VOCA](#) is in grave jeopardy, however, and Congress must act to save it.

- ★ Without VOCA funds, many victim service programs would cease to exist, leaving survivors and victims with nowhere to turn.
- ★ Recent declining deposits into VOCA's non-taxpayer funding source – the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) – have drastically reduced VOCA funding and will continue to do so unless Congress acts urgently.
- ★ Congress must amend the law to deposit penalties and fines from non-prosecution and deferred prosecution agreements into the CVF in order to restore the fund and to avoid more catastrophic cuts to domestic violence and other victim services.
- ★ On March 17, 2021, the House passed H.R. 1652, VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021 (“VOCA Fix”). NNEDV urges the Senate to pass the companion bill, S. 611.

Invest in Key Programs via FY22 Appropriations

Subcommittees: Commerce Justice & Science (CJS), Labor, Health & Human Services (LHHS), and Transportation, Housing & Urban Development (THUD)

Funding core services has been and should continue to be a central way for Congress to ensure survivors have access to safety and justice. Additionally, Congress must invest in a comprehensive prevention strategy that reaches each state, territory, and tribe and invests in culturally specific programs. Congress must work to ensure that organizations led by and for Communities of Color have fair access to federal resources that address violence against women to provide culturally specific responses focused on their communities.

We urge Congress to provide significant investments for domestic and sexual violence programs, with a specific priority on the programs below, described in [more detail here](#).

Victims of Crime Act Fund (VOCA): \$2.65 Billion and Policy Changes

VOCA is made up of fines and penalties paid by federal criminals, not taxpayer dollars, and funds nearly 6,500 victim services organizations. Congress must also pass a statutory fix to increase deposits into the fund.

Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA): \$463 Million

FVPSA funds emergency shelters, crisis lines, counseling, victim assistance, and other vital services for over one million domestic violence victims and their children each year.

Culturally Specific Services Program (New HHS Program): \$35 Million

Survivors of color urgently need culturally relevant services that address domestic and sexual violence.

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA): \$1 Billion in Funding for Key Programs

VAWA programs ensure that victims are safe and offenders are held accountable.

- ★ **Sexual Assault Services Program**: \$100M for rape crisis centers.
- ★ **Culturally specific program**: \$40M to provide services for survivors of color.
- ★ **Transitional Housing Program**: \$80M to house survivors and rebuild their lives.
- ★ **Legal Assistance for Victims**: \$80M to provide legal services to survivors.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Funds for Homeless Assistance: \$75 Million

An ongoing set-aside in the HUD Continuum of Care program allows communities to provide targeted housing and assistance for survivors facing homelessness.

VAWA and FVPSA Reauthorizations: Expanding and Building Upon Core Domestic Violence Legislation

Committees: Judiciary, Senate HELP / House Ed & Labor, Senate Banking / House Financial Services, and Senate Finance / House Ways & Means

VAWA, FVPSA, and VOCA work together to create and support comprehensive responses to the needs of victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The laws and funding support domestic violence shelters and housing programs, legal services, courts, rape crisis centers, children's services, prevention, community outreach, and other state, local, and tribal programs that provide victim and family services. In order to maintain and bolster these protections and services, amend and reauthorize the laws as outlined below.

- ★ Reauthorize the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act](#) by passing H.R. 2119 and S. 1275, with provisions including:
 - Dedicated funding for tribal coalitions, culturally specific service providers, and substantially increased funding.
 - An [expanded Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances \(DELTA\) prevention program](#) to build the capacity of domestic violence coalitions in every state and territory and in tribes, as well as provide targeted funding to culturally specific programs.
- ★ Reauthorize the [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#) to advance safety for all survivors, especially for survivors of color and other historically marginalized survivors. Congress must invest in VAWA programs and protections that

advance access to safety, justice, and economic stability for survivors while reducing reliance on systems that are not helping all survivors.

- The House passed H.R. 1620, The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021, on March 17, 2021. NNEDV urges the Senate to pass a similar bill as a matter of priority.
- The bill takes a holistic approach, addressing the complex realities of survivors' lives. It maintains established protections, while also addressing persistent gaps.
- We urge the Senate to strengthen and pass the House bill. In particular, NNEDV supports:
 - funding, including a new \$40 million authorization for the Culturally Specific Services Program;
 - avenues to justice that focus on victim autonomy, agency, and safety, including investments in responses beyond a criminal system approach and expanded access to VAWA-funded legal services for survivors;
 - housing protections that allow survivors in federally assisted housing to relocate to new, safe housing with victim relocation vouchers; maintain housing after a perpetrator leaves; or terminate a lease early;
 - restoration of tribal jurisdiction that allows tribes to hold non-native perpetrators of sexual assault, stalking, child abuse, elder abuse, assault against law enforcement officers, and trafficking accountable when they commit crimes on native lands;
 - investment in prevention via the Rape Prevention and Education Program and VAWA Department of Justice prevention programs;
 - closure of dangerous legal loopholes in existing federal domestic violence-related firearms laws that will help reduce domestic violence and dating violence homicides;
 - economic justice responses that help survivors access unemployment insurance and help to clarify what constitutes economic abuse; and
 - provisions for immigrant survivors that address the abuse they face, including: protecting survivors from detention and deportation; increasing access to VAWA protections; reducing the wait for work authorization; and making desperately needed U visas more accessible.

- VAWA non-discrimination requirements guarantee equal access to VAWA protections for all survivors regardless of gender and funding for LGBTQ+ specific services.

Housing Policies

Committees: Senate Banking Housing & Urban Affairs / House Financial Services

Domestic violence and sexual assault are key drivers of homelessness for women, children and LGBTQ+ individuals. Survivors need [access to housing options](#), including emergency assistance, flexible funding, shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent housing subsidies, as well as protections against housing discrimination. Additionally, domestic violence and sexual assault programs depend on HUD Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grants funds to provide safe housing for survivors; yet, these programs have many barriers that exclude victim service providers. Congress must expand upon and support the legislation below in order to ensure survivors can flee or maintain housing to remain safe from abuse.

- ★ Preserve the VAWA housing protections included in H.R. 1620 in the final VAWA passed bill:
 - Protect survivors from eviction based on the criminal actions of perpetrators;
 - Establish reliable “family break-up procedures,” which would require that survivors retain possession of the unit or subsidy in the event of a family break-up;
 - Authorize funding and a process for distribution for emergency transfer vouchers for VAWA-eligible survivors;
 - Allow early lease termination in VAWA-covered housing;
 - Address the need for consistent implementation, compliance and accountability regarding VAWA’s housing protections and create a HUD VAWA director position to drive implementation; and
 - Protect survivors’ rights to request emergency and law enforcement assistance and support effective law enforcement in assisting survivors.
- ★ Introduce, build upon, expand, and pass legislation like The HEALS Act (S. 1624/H.R. 5184) to improve survivor access to HUD Continuum of Care resources by supporting access to HUD funds for victim service providers who provide trauma-informed, confidential, and safe housing options for survivors.
- ★ Introduce and pass the [Fair Housing for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors Act of 2020 \(H.R. 5531\)](#), which would give HUD and the DOJ clear and

direct authority to protect survivors from housing discrimination in the private rental market, and the Preventing Sexual Harassment in Public Housing Act (H.R. 5788), which would compel the federal government to ensure reporting and investigations of housing-related discrimination and harassment, particularly sexual harassment.

- ★ Introduce and pass legislation that protects tenants from unfair eviction screening policies that disproportionately affect Women of Color, such as previous evictions, credit history, and criminal background checks.

Economic Justice Policies

Committees: Senate HELP / House Ed & Labor and Senate Finance / House Ways & Means

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the nation's response to it, have laid bare the severe economic disparities in this country. Survivors need job security, employment protections, access to non-traditional and high paying jobs, and barrier-free access to cash, utility, and food assistance because of job insecurity (often caused by harassment and stalking by abusers). Ninety-nine percent of domestic violence victims experience financial abuse.¹ Addressing economic conditions and social conditions can reduce risks of domestic violence perpetration and victimization.² We urge Congress to increase protections and options for survivors, in the following ways:

- ★ Federal legislation to revise and expand safety net protections for survivors, such as cash and food assistance and access to tax credits.³
- ★ Federal labor and employment protections legislation including:
 - Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 7/S. 205): provides updates to the Equal Pay Act of 1963 that update and strengthen tools to help close the gender wage gap;⁴

¹ Adams, A. E. (May 6, 2011). Measuring the Effects of Domestic Violence on Women's Financial Well-Being. Retrieved from <https://centerforfinancialsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/adams2011.pdf>.

² Niolon, P., Kearns M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf>.

³ Federal Safety Net programs include:

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) – including enhancing Family Violence Option (FVO) waivers and access for immigrant survivors;
- Child support;
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI);
- Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credits;
- Additional tax credits to low and moderate working families and individuals; and
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (by boosting the maximum allowable and eliminating time limits and other barriers).

⁴ See the Paycheck Fairness Act ([H.R. 7/S. 205](https://www.congress.gov/bills/115/7))

- Raise the Wage Act (H.R. 603/S. 53): incrementally raises the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2025;⁵
 - The FAMILY Act (H.R. 804/S. 248): provides workers paid time off after the birth of a child, during an illness, or while caring for ill family members;⁶
 - The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 2465/S. 1195): provides paid sick and safe days to enable survivors to attend court proceedings, meet with lawyers and advocates, obtain services from a domestic violence or sexual assault program, and recover from or seek medical care for physical and/or psychological injuries due to the violence perpetrated against them;⁷
 - Employment anti-discrimination measures to prohibit survivors from being treated differently, fired, or not hired because they are experiencing or have experienced domestic or sexual violence;⁸
 - Requirements for states to include leaving employment for reasons relating to domestic/sexual violence on their “good cause” list for unemployment insurance;⁹
 - The Pregnant Worker Fairness Act (H.R. 1065): provides protections for pregnant workers.¹⁰
- ★ Pass legislation that protects survivors from cyber violence, which often impedes employment and economic stability.

Criminal Justice and Other System Reform

Committees: Judiciary Senate HELP / House Ed & Labor and Senate Finance / House Ways & Means

The criminal justice system and other systems have routinely failed survivors of color and other survivors who face oppression and are marginalized. Not all survivors feel safe interacting with law enforcement; therefore, it is important for us to invest in non-carceral approaches to addressing domestic violence. In order to ensure that all survivors, especially survivors of color, can access safety, justice, and economic stability, we call on Congress to:

⁵ Raise the Wage Act ([H.R. 603/S. 53](#)).

⁶ [The FAMILY Act \(H.R. 804 / S. 248\)](#).

⁷ In the 116th Congress, paid sick and safe days was included in the [Healthy Families Act \(H.R. 1784/S. 840\)](#). The [PAID Leave Act \(H.R. 6442/S. 3513\)](#) combined provisions from both the FAMILY Act and the Healthy Families Act.

⁸ See for example the SAFE Act of 2019, [H.R. 1468](#).

⁹ See [H.R. 1620](#), section 703.

¹⁰ See the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act ([H.R. 1065](#)).

- ★ Support legislation that removes barriers within the criminal justice system that prevent access to safety, justice, and services for Communities of Color; create meaningful alternatives to the existing system; and reduce the number of incarcerated survivors.
- ★ Take meaningful steps to address other systems such as child welfare, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and public housing, following the guidance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders in the domestic violence and sexual assault fields.

Protecting Immigrant Survivors of Violence

Abusers often exploit survivors' immigration status to further isolate or abuse them. The immigration system should prioritize the safety and autonomy of immigrant survivors. Yet, persistent gaps in the law deny [immigrant survivors access to safety and justice](#). NNEDV calls on Congress to:

- ★ Strengthen survivor-based protections, including the U visa program;
- ★ Safeguard abused dependent spouses and children;
- ★ Support survivor self-sufficiency and remove vulnerabilities to further victimization; and
- ★ Prevent detention and removal of victims and encourage them to seek protection.

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